



TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
BUDGET HEARINGS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
FEBRUARY 15, 2013

Sen. Harp, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Abby Anderson and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide, nonprofit organization working to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and advocating a safe, effective and fair system for those involved. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

We are concerned to see the funding for School Based Health Centers was reduced in the Governor's budget. A goal of those funds was to provide physical and mental health to children in especially vulnerable schools and communities. By annualizing these cuts, we turn back from the commitment we made as a state last year to address the needs of the whole child at school, recognizing that children can't learn if they aren't in school due to physical or emotional maladies.

We are particularly concerned about this cut's impact on mental health care access, as it is estimated that only about one quarter of children who need mental health care receive it – even before this proposed cut in funding. Schools are a critical part of the mental health care delivery system. School Based Health Centers provide individual, group and family counseling for mental health issues in more than 40,000 visits on a yearly basis.¹ Such mental health treatment can both reduce stigma and facilitate access.

We know that a large percentage of children in the juvenile justice system have a profound trauma background.

Early intervention, through services like a School Based Health Center, can recognize and address a child's trauma needs. A child with trauma isn't destined to become a delinquent. But sometimes behaviors related to the trauma present themselves and are perceived as purely delinquent, instead of as a symptom of deeper issues. Sometimes a family is advised to have their child arrested because it is the only way to get the mental health services the child needs. Services like School Based Health Centers are an important investment for the state to make because they create better outcomes for children and provide significant cost savings in the long run due to improved health and decreased usage of high cost emergency interventions such as hospitalization, court involvement and residential treatment.

We would therefore urge the Appropriations Committee to reverse the proposed cuts to School Based Health Centers.

Alliance member organizations:

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI Children's Community Programs, Connecticut Association for Human Services, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI-CT and the Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children

¹ "Protecting the Health of Connecticut's Young People," *Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers*, (October 2010), available at: <http://www.ctschoolhealth.org/Announcements/view.asp?id=54>
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